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Making It In Armenia - Understanding



“Home is not a place. It is a feeling. Armenians are a great example of this.”



Once I decided I had to make it in Armenia, I had a goal. Before, I was sort of floating. I had my project and a few small things, but I had no rhythm to my days. My new goal was a great way to break this, but it was too big. You cannot just go out and make it, so I broke it down into pieces.

I remember conversations with friends when we were discussing exactly what my goals were to begin the process of “making it.” It was such a hard thing to define, but it was so important to me to make a plan. Now I understand that it truly did not matter what these goals were. The difference was I now had goals. I took back my life. This was the first major realization I had; I was responsible for making my life better.

Not that this is a groundbreaking discovery. We all pretty much know this. When you are in that downhill spiral though, it can be hard to remember simple things like this. Taking ownership of your happiness still is not a magic switch that always makes you happy. Just a few weeks ago I began to feel terrible again to the point that I started to look for plane tickets back to California.

I was in a slump, and I let the things around me take control. Fortunately, friends and family stepped in when they saw what was going on. They reminded me that it is just part of life, and slowly, as always, things come back around. It is easy to complain about things that make your life bad. It is out of your control so you do not have to feel at fault. I am not putting blame on those who do this. I still do it too. However, no matter where you are, you will always be responsible for yourself.

I believe part of the reason it is so easy to give up this responsibility as an expat is because you get to hide behind the wall of foreignness. There is an entire country to blame for all of your problems. No one is going to question you for feeling foreign and out of place when you are foreign and out of place. With my new perspective on becoming happy, I also had a bit of a reality



offer that I have never had. I accepted that my life will not be the same, but it can still be equally pleasant. That does not mean every day is going to be a party full of exciting, new things. Some days you are going to get stuck in traffic, have a bad day at work, or have no one to hang out with in the evening . That is not Armenia. That is life.

Once I had gotten my mindset right, I was ready to start making the changes in my life to be happier. Some of these were big changes and others were simple. I cannot offer this as advice, but I do have to say my happiness greatly increased when I started dating my girlfriend. It started when we first became friends, so no need to look for a partner just to be happier. Shortly after meeting her I also started to make some friends that had lived in Armenia more long term. I felt like I could connect with people again, which was something I knew had been missing since I moved.

Other than improving my interactions with people, I started a job that I enjoy. It gave my life a little more purpose and regularity. I started studying Armenian again. I can see myself navigating the world better and understanding more of what is going on around me which is a practical benefit. On the personal side, Armenian is the reason I am in this country in the first place. It was my love that sparked everything I pursued after that first language class. Studying has brought that back in my life.

I am a lot better now, but something I am continuing to work on is handling cultural differences. The main change here was to let go of preconceptions and stop asking why. Sure, some things are pretty strange or even uncomfortable on occasion, but a few of these unexpected events have become very fond memories. I still feel foreign at times, but I can make that feeling a lot less significant.

I was recently telling a new acquaintance about my time in Armenia and the things that have happened to me. His response



I can continue this list for hours. My point is, everyone who decides to move will have this list too, but none of ours will be the same. We may have similar moments, but this particular story is mine. I had advantages and disadvantages that affected my move. If I am being completely honest I think I had a lot more advantages, so I cannot sit here and tell everyone to do what I did, but I know there are people who do not believe they would be able to make it in Armenia and they definitely could.

It feels a little strange for this to be the end of my series about making it in Armenia. I am close to my one year mark, but this story is far from over. I have no idea what my future looks like, but I am excited to see what comes. This entire series has been about experiences of being away from “home”, so I want to end with my favorite thing I have learned in the last year. Home is not a place. It is a feeling. Armenians are a great example of this. They have been spread throughout the world and made themselves a home everywhere they went, in countries where they share no similarities with the majority of the population. I am not home yet, but I will be soon. That is how I know I am making it in Armenia.

Andrew Molica

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